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Performance of the programme of work and budget, including implementation of the resolutions of the Environment Assembly

Strengthening the science-policy interface: a gap analysis

Note by the secretariat

Summary

1. The member States of the governing body of the United Nations Environment Programme have long recognized the need for a stronger science-policy interface and have pushed for additional guidance through the adoption of the following decision and resolution:

(a) Governing Council decision 27/2:

"Decides that the governing body of the United Nations Environment Programme will promote a strong science policy interface by reviewing the state of the environment" and "requests the Executive Director to identify critical gaps and present a report, with recommendations, to the governing body;"

(b) United Nations Environment Assembly resolution 1/4:

"Reiterates the request to the Executive Director to submit a gap analysis report on environmental data, information and assessments as well as recommendations on policy instruments for a strengthened science-policy interface to the United Nations Environment Assembly at its second session."

2. Accordingly, the report entitled *Strengthening the science-policy interface: a gap analysis* aims to identify new ways of improving the science-policy interface supporting evidence-informed decision-making on the environmental dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals by:

(a) Providing a summary of the characteristics of an effective science-policy interface;

(b) Identifying the gaps found in practice in science-policy interfaces;

(c) Providing practical steps that member States and international organizations can take to fill these gaps.

* UNEP/EA.3/1.

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3. The report is available at the following link: https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/22261/Gap_Analysis_2017.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

Strengthening the Science-Policy Interface:
A gap analysis

Executive Summary

1. Context: why do we need an improved science-policy interface?

The world is increasingly faced with environmental challenges which are exacerbated by an absence of coordination among different actors around the globe. In a global political context where scientific evidence is not often understood or used by policy-makers, there is a growing disconnect that has emerged, which not only dismisses, but excludes opportunities for collaboration.

Science and policy are at a crossroads. The interface needs to be framed by an effective and efficient governance structure to promote better interaction between the two. This intersection can be facilitated by operational knowledge from non-state actors.

A dynamic science-policy interface can be a core instrument to support well informed decision making on the environment while also engaging the right actors in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

1.1 Mandate and scope for the report

United Nations Environment Programme Member States have long recognized the need for a stronger sciencepolicy interface and have pushed for addition guidance through the following decisions and resolutions:

United Nations Environment Programme Governing Council decision 27/2:

"Decides that the governing body of the United Nations Environment Programme will promote a strong science policy interface by reviewing the state of the environment...." and "requests the Executive Director to identify critical gaps and present a report, with recommendations, to the governing body" (United Nations Environment Programme 2014a p. 17).

United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) 1 resolution 1/ 4:

"reiterates the request to the Executive Director to submit a gap analysis report on environmental data, information and assessments as well as recommendations on policy instruments for a strengthened science-policy interface to the United Nations Environment Assembly at its second session" (United Nations Environment Programme 2014b).

In this context, this report aims to identify new ways to improve the science-policy interface by:

- Providing a summary of the characteristics of an effective science-policy interface.
- Identifying the gaps found in practice in science-policy interfaces.
- Providing practical steps that Member States and international organisations can take to fill these gaps.

2. What does a gap-free, effective science-policy interface look like?

Science-policy activity is evolving to meet the challenges of delivering impact and supporting the achievement of the environmental dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals. Identifying the key elements of an effective science-policy interface allows for the identification of the internal gaps that act as barriers to such processes, and which impact decisions. There are three key elements for an effective science-policy Interface:

a. Links in the chain: Motivated and capable individuals, able to utilise and exchange evidence and expertise to
b. influence decision outcomes
c. The right evidence: Availability of the appropriate data and expertise
d. Productive exchange: of this evidence between individuals in the pathways

2.1 Key challenges facing the science-policy interface and its evolution

Participants at the Member State Forum for Science, Technology and Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals in 2016 recognised the implications of one of the new challenges facing science-policy activity. They concluded: *"Sustainable Development Goals are disruptive. They imply a radical departure from business as usual.... likely to require new ways to approach the science-policy interface"* (E/HLPF/2016/6 p. 2 and 3). In the environmental area, three challenges have driven an evolution in science-policy interface activities:

a. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals: The achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will require the co-operation of a multitude of decision-makers with divergent primary priorities, scientists from a wide-range of disciplines and a great degree of understanding of interactions between achievement of parallel goals. In the spirit of 'leaving no one behind' it is crucial that gender mainstreaming is adopted in all science-policy activities, failure of which might lead to policies that aggravate the existing unintended consequences that further intensify inequality (United Nations Environment Programme 2016a).

b. Supporting Policy Implementation at the regional and country level: To tackle continued environmental degradation, despite well-developed global environmental governance, science-policy activity is moving further towards supporting implementation of international environmental agreements in countries and regions.
c. Engaging with a "post-normal" scientific context: The political context for science-policy work has changed: decisions are urgent, uncertainty is high and political will fluctuates rapidly.

Science-policy activities aim at more than the synthesis of scientific research. They are designed to influence policy where the existing availability of evidence alone has not influenced outcomes. These three challenges above have brought two additional hurdles to science-policy activities being effective in this mission:

a. Working with divergent viewpoints: Improved outcomes come from engaging policy-makers who hold significantly divergent viewpoints on the importance of the environment, but whose decisions influence environmental outcomes, for example officials in economics or agriculture ministries.
b. Dealing with complexity: Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals requires scientific advice on complex interactions between goals achievement, which are dynamic, non-linear and uncertain. Policy processes are also complex – with interactions of multiple parties producing uncertain outcomes.

These additional hurdles not easily fit into the movement through the data-information-knowledge-action chain, which requires processes that are predictable, include the right actors and that are designed to achieve impact.

2.2 Changes to the practice of science-policy activity

The response of science-policy organizations to these new challenges is an evolution of their activities, including moving away from highlighting the nature of problems towards providing solutions and assessing their implications, for example by improved scenario-building. The trends are illustrated by adaptations in practices by some of the major scientific assessments: the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC); Intergovernmental Science- Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), United Nations Environment Programme's Global Environment Outlook (GEO) Assessment process; and the International Resource Panel (IRP) – shown in the **table below**.

These changes have created strong interest from United Nations Environment Assembly Member States in understanding the full range of changes to science-policy activity needed to more effectively improve environmental outcomes, in the face of these challenges, and where gaps exist in current practices.

A wide range of organisations are active in the science-policy interface, and have the potential to reduce these gaps through several initiatives. These include: United Nations Environment Programme Integrated Environmental Assessments, interfaces linked to Multilateral Environmental Agreements, exchange and capacity building initiatives like the Science-Policy-Business Forum, and national and regional initiatives like national science academies.

Evolution	IPCC	IPBES	GEO	IRP
1. From identifying problems to uptake of solutions	Agreed outline of IPCC's next (AR6) assessment has an 'IPCC 2.0' concept - assessing the solutions that will improve people's lives" (Climate Centre 2017).	One of IPBES work mandates is policy support through provision of 'policyrelevant tools' and catalysing their use.	The logic behind GEO-6's Outlook and Scenarios section was based around 'How to' rather than 'What if'.	IRP aims to tackle environmental degradation through the uptake of resource efficient technologies.
2. Dealing with wider audiences and divergent viewpoints	IPCC AR5 develops shared socio-economic pathways.	IPBES nurtures input from indigenous and local knowledge and uses a multidisciplinary advisory board.	GEO-6 is guided by an Intergovernmental and Stakeholder advisory group, group, in addition to a Scientific Advisory Panel.	IRP reports include economic assessments of resource efficiency.
3. Increase effective exchange of evidence	IPCC partners with European Climate Foundation (ECF) to gain strategic communications expertise.	IPBES partners with UNEP, UNEP-WCMC and other relevant partners to gain their expertise in interaction with national and regional policy processes.	GEO-6 is a participatory process producing outputs tailored to local and thematic issues.	IRP partners with Systemiq to gain external expertise in engagement of policy and business stakeholders.

3. Remaining gaps in the Science-Policy Interface

The identification of the remaining gaps in any science-policy interface comes out of understanding the specific challenges and solutions in relation to altering any environmental problem or outcome. This depends on:

a. Who needs evidence to reach a changed policy outcome, what their current perspectives are;
b. What evidence needs they have; and
c. What the best pathways, intermediaries, content, processes or form are, for them to take-up and use evidence.

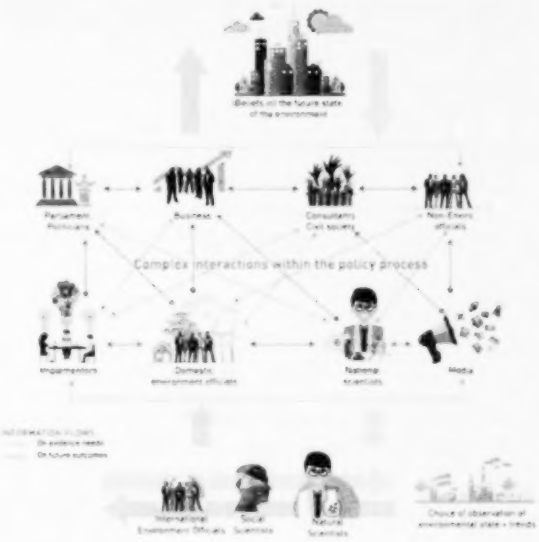
Gender equality in science-policy activities

There is a pressing need to effectively promote gender equality in science-policy activities in a bid to decrease existing gender gaps. Various governments have made commitments in support of gender equality and these commitments ought to be followed up and implemented. The following 'Transformative Actions' developed by the Gender Advisory Board of the United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development, provide useful suggestions to address gender-gaps in Science and Technology (Schiebinger 2010 p. 5-6) :

1. **Establishing gender equity in science and technology education**
2. **Removing obstacles to women in scientific and technological careers**
3. **Making science responsive to the gender dimension**
4. **Making the science and technology decision-making process more gender aware**
5. **Relating better with local knowledge systems**
6. **Addressing ethical issues related to gender in science and technology**
7. **Improving the collection of gender-disaggregated data for policy-makers**
8. **Equal opportunity for entry and advancement into larger-scale science, technology, engineering, mathematics disciplines (STEM) and innovation systems (Schiebinger 2010 p. 5-6).**

The answers to these questions are not always obvious. For example, evaluative research of sciencepolicy activities shows that personal exchange with the most relevant decision makers is the most frequent way to bring about use of evidence. The reasons for this are explained in the report.

The **figure next page** shows current thinking on the stylised information and evidence flows within participants in a science-policy interface, to help consideration of gaps and solutions.



Based on this understanding, gaps in any sciencepolicy interface can be identified, prioritised and tackled. Many organisations have completed or undertaken reviews to gain this understanding: e.g. The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) is starting an internal review process, and the International Resource Panel (IRP) discussed a new strategy to increase impact in November 2017.

Gaps can be found in three areas:

1) gaps in the chain of capable, motivated people exchanging evidence between scientists and final decision makers; 2) gaps in available evidence and 3) gaps in the effective transfer of evidence between the people in this chain.

4. Possible ways to address these gaps

Many gaps are persistent or recurring (United Nations Environment Programme 2014a), suggesting that existing practices in the science-policy interface are hard to change. Steps to change existing practices are needed to fill gaps, for example, by changing the governance frameworks of organizations involved in the science-policy interface.

The five categories below present ten steps which may be a helpful guide to action:

Step 1: Build your own understanding of gaps and capacities

- Seek to understand the links in the chains by which evidence could impact on the chosen environmental outcomes, determining which policy processes are relevant, who are the key players in those policy processes, what are their current viewpoints and their evidence needs. Build a more specific sketch of the pathways to impact – or 'theory of change'- for each intervention.
- Understand what information is missing about these pathways to your impact, and from whom and how you could find it. Learn through feedback from your own activities – through improved use of evaluation of impacts, and from the lessons and examples of other organizations.
- Prioritize your activities on these understandings. Dedicate resources to actions to build your capacity to engage with the new challenges – e.g. in skills, external expertise, networks or new decision processes. Build new partnerships to strengthen your capabilities.

Step 2: Build partnerships to grow your capacity to act

- Gain access to specific complementary expertise, sectoral and geographic networks and access to important decision makers by forming partnerships with external organizations with shared interests in improved policy outcomes.
- Use ongoing partnership activities to promote learning of new perspectives and process skills in your organization's officials and academic and governmental participants.

Steps 3 and 4: Fill gaps in available evidence

- **3.** Stimulate greater investment in monitoring and reporting of environmental states, particularly in those areas with clear links to welfare – like air quality. Fund long-term environmental monitoring to deliver trend data that can be openly accessed online by decision makers.
- **4.** Build statistical capacities, nationally and globally, to deliver reliable and timely statistics that can stimulate and inform policy debates. Promote the standardization of methods to allow comparability across countries.

Steps 5, 6 and 7: Build the capacities of other participants (or links in the chain to outcomes)

- **5.** Increase the professional rewards for scientific participants engaging in science-policy activity, through changes to national funding metrics. Build capacities to engage in trans-disciplinary, multi-stakeholder science-policy processes, e.g. placements and skills training.
- **6.** Promote changes to decision-making cultures and processes in nations and regions that move towards Evidence Based Policy Making, to give more incentives for individuals to apply evidence in policy.
- **7.** Design the participatory processes in science-policy interfaces in ways that increase the learning opportunities of all participants on ways to deliver more effective science-policy activity.

Steps 8, 9, 10: Create practices for the effective exchange of evidence

- **8.** Move away from 'dissemination' and 'outreach' to promoting productive exchange and learning by prioritized participants. Re-design science-policy participatory processes for more productive exchange between individual participants, planning activity around the needs of the relevant decision makers (or intermediaries).
- **9.** Put important assessment processes on a secure financial and structural footing to ensure that they can plan and adapt to future challenges.
- **10.** Create written outputs that fit participant's needs, tailoring form, frequency and content of outputs to different audiences in different contexts and potential use. Increase transparency of evidence and the processes to agree it, providing open-access to underlying data. Support legitimacy and trust in evidence through comprehensive review processes.

Conclusion

Gaps in evidence or between actors engaged in the science-policy interface mean that desired outcomes are unlikely to be achieved. As knowledge on effective science-policy work has grown over the last decades, it has driven an evolution in the practice of science-policy activity. This evolution reflects innovation and experimentation by the leading actors in sciencepolicy interfaces. Science-policy organisations require dedicated change processes to their governance models to have impact in the future, including providing information for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The evidence that they provide plays an essential role in creating the political will to develop policy. This report suggests to Member States, and to all key actors in the data-information-knowledge-action chain, different tools and methods in which gaps between science and policy can be filled, while providing encouragement for collaboration among these networks.

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Performance of the programme of work and budget, including implementation of the resolutions of the Environment Assembly

Proposal of the Executive Director on the revision of the United Nations Environment Programme 2011 marine and coastal strategy, pursuant to resolution 2/10 on oceans and seas

Summary

The United Nations Environment Programme and its collaborating centres carried out an online survey of the effectiveness of the Environment Programme 2011 marine and coastal strategy. Further to the survey, the Environment Programme entered into a revision of the strategy.

* UNEP/EA.3/1.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report provides information on the implementation of resolution 2/10 on oceans and seas, together with recommendations and suggested action.

II. Progress in the implementation of resolution 2/10

2. In paragraph 17 of its resolution 2/10, the United Nations Environment Assembly requested the Executive Director to assess the effectiveness of the United Nations Environment Programme 2011 marine and coastal strategy and, on the basis of that assessment, submit a proposal for its updating, revision or replacement for consideration by the Environment Assembly at its next session.

3. The Environment Programme carried out a survey of the effectiveness of the 2011 strategy and developed a revised strategy based on the survey. The proposed framework of a revised strategy is set out in the annex to the present document.

III. Recommendations and suggested action

4. The United Nations Environment Assembly is invited to review the framework strategy and may request the Executive Director to continue its development so that a full-fledged strategy proposal is submitted to the Environment Assembly.

Annex

Oceans and seas

1. The influence of oceans and seas on our life on earth is enormous. However, marine and coastal ecosystems are changing rapidly due to increasing human pressure for resources combined with the impact of our actions, such as land-based pollution, acidification and climate change. However, oceans and seas are at the core of countries' economies and are critical for food security, building resilience and mitigating climate change. Oceans and seas have the potential to spur economic growth in a number of sectors, to contribute to eradicating poverty, to enhance social inclusion, to improve human welfare and to create new opportunities for employment and decent work for all.

2. The objective of the United Nations Environment Programme's strategic direction on oceans and seas is to secure concrete action for sustaining healthy marine and coastal ecosystems. The potential of sustainable blue growth to securing access to food and energy for future generations, as well as to contributing to poverty reduction and sustained livelihoods, is critical. The Environment Programme will implement action to maintain marine and coastal ecosystem services to ensure sustained livelihoods and food and energy provisions.

Transformative leadership

3. There is a need for enhanced leadership on oceans and increased capability to implement and monitor the ocean-related targets and indicators set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Environment Programme aims to step up its engagement at the global level and to take on a transformative leadership partnership with key stakeholders and leaders from business, civil society, the media, the science community and Governments to drive change and set out a course for action guided by Sustainable Development Goal 14 on the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. The Environment Programme aims to be a platform for engagement under the priority areas set out below with a view to supporting member States in the implementation, inspiration and showcasing of best practices.

Priority 1: Regional ocean governance

4. The Regional Seas Programme, established in 1974 and now consisting of 18 Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans covering more than 150 countries, is a core building block for the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources. There is a need to strengthen collaboration with other regional bodies and to enhance initiatives such as the regional fisheries bodies and large marine ecosystem projects to advance the implementation of the ocean-related Sustainable Development Goals. The use of the Regional Seas Programme as an implementation platform for the areas listed below will enhance awareness of the challenges and opportunities of the national and regional actions for seas close to countries. Working in new regional partnership with various stakeholders from the private sector, non-governmental organizations, Governments and academia can nurture innovation and ambitious changes. The Environment Programme is an active observer of marine-related activities of the Arctic Council, in particular through the Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment working group and the new Task Force on Arctic Marine Cooperation. The working group under the Arctic Council is a central part of the Regional Seas Programme network.

5. Integrated area-based management is a key instrument to implementing an ecosystem approach. Through the Regional Seas Programme, the Environment Programme and its partners will channel its support to member States by providing practical solutions and policy advice on marine spatial planning, marine protected areas and integrated coastal zone management customized to local, national and regional settings. Its approaches will incorporate economic, social and environment information to support decision-making.

Priority 2: Enhanced partnerships to prevent pollution of the marine environment

6. The Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities, adopted in 1995 and whose secretariat is hosted by the Environment Programme, includes multi-stakeholder partnerships focusing on nutrient management, marine litter and wastewater. Although the Global Programme of Action undergoes an intergovernmental review process every five years, it needs to be reenergized and adapt to the next generations of pollutants and stakeholder engagement. A number of important global developments have taken place since the last Intergovernmental Review Meeting, held in 2012, that have serious implications for the future direction of the Global Programme of Action:

(a) In 2015, Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in which land-based marine pollution issues are addressed in targets 6.3 and 14.1;

(b) The United Nations Environment Assembly, the main governing body of the Environment Programme, was established in 2012 with a universal membership of United Nations Member States. The expected outcomes of the third session, to be held in Nairobi from 4 to 6 December 2017 under the theme of pollution, will include resolutions and action towards a pollution-free planet that may require a specific implementation mechanism;

(c) The Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans have continued to provide regional support to further global responses, addressing land-based pollution through their associated regional protocols ratified by an increasing number of countries;

7. Furthermore, the Global Programme of Action needs to take account of emerging issues that may require attention, including ocean acidification and sargassum seaweed. Closer collaboration with other relevant United Nations bodies and external stakeholders is necessary; for example, the private sector has a clear role and is an essential part of solutions. The International Maritime Organization and the shipping industry are additional examples of areas in which further consideration is needed on how to work closely with partners to tackle marine pollution.

8. It is expected that a political declaration on pollution will be adopted by the Environment Assembly at its third session, along with resolutions that support specific actions, including marine and coastal pollution. The Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities and its current three partnerships should be fit for purpose and fully aligned and integrated with the outcome of the third session of the Environment Assembly, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the pollution protocols under the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans.

Cross-cutting themes

(a) The economy of the ocean: enhancing sustainable blue economy

9. Investing in healthy oceans and coastal management provides good returns and contributes to national economies and development, while contributing to a healthy marine environment. By mapping marine ecosystems, assessing and valuating marine ecosystems, an ecosystem-based approach towards the blue economy can be developed (also referred to as sustainable use of marine and coastal ecosystems for economic growth). The "economics of the ocean" concept will be more relevant in a private sector discourse.

10. The blue economy will also be used when working with low-income countries, including small island developing States, blue carbon and forests. The Environment Assembly adopted resolution 2/4 on the role, functions and modalities for Environment Programme implementation of the SAMOA Pathway as a means of facilitating achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, which is linked to sustainable tourism. The Environment Programme will also continue to address vulnerability, focusing on impacts on livelihoods, poverty reduction and blue economic growth. A core part of developing a sustainable blue economy involves creating innovative business models based on the sustainable use of natural resources.

(b) Ocean and climate change

11. The Environment Programme will further develop and promote ecosystem-based adaptation and mitigation (blue carbon) as key approaches to building climate change resilience. Future work towards implementation of the Paris Agreement will include support to countries in development and implementation of national adaptation plans and emission reduction schemes, working with the Climate Technology Centre. Blue carbon approaches will be integral to ocean-based economy frameworks and investment strategies.

(c) Coral reefs

12. The Environment Programme is working with the secretariat of the International Coral Reef Initiative to further develop the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network. The Environment Programme has initiated preparation of an outreach campaign on coral reefs, to be rolled out in 2018. The Global Coral Reef Partnership of the Environment Programme and Regional Seas Programme develops tools and supports regional and national measures that build climate change resilience. The Environment Programme will take the lead in the global community to drive the work on coral reefs through Communities of Ocean Action as a follow-up to the United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, held in New York from 5 to 9 June 2017.

(d) Communication: ocean literacy

13. The aim is to communicate stories and create a passion for commitment and change by enhancing knowledge about the linkages between healthy oceans and life on land. A central part of increasing ocean literacy is to both educate and communicate the value of marine resources in economic, social and cultural terms. The Environment Programme has long-standing experience with nature-based economics and envisages a study on the economics of ecosystems and biodiversity for oceans. The CleanSeas global campaign on marine litter was launched in February 2017 with a focus on non-recoverable plastics and single-use plastics. A core component in communication is to align our work with key players to drive the agenda forward.